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TAGS: KMDR KPAO OIIP OPRC PGOV PREL PK
SUBJECT: SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: FEBRUARY 22, 2010

Summary: Reports of political significance, particularly Prime Minister Gilani's remarks hinting that "all undesirable amendments introduced in the Constitution by dictators would be revoked before President Zardari's address to the joint session of parliament in March" this year dominated headlines in all newspapers on Monday morning. "Dawn," reported that the Obama administration had selected a career diplomat Cameron Hume to replace Ambassador Patterson in Islamabad. Several major newspapers highlighted reports that the CIA seeks custody of Taliban military commander Mullah Abdul Ghani Bradar, who was captured in Pakistan last month. Newspapers highlighted General Petraeus' remarks made in an interview with NBC, describing Pakistan's anti-militancy steps in recent months as "impressive," and that the current battle around Afghan town of Marjah is the "opening battle in a long campaign." Reports of the ongoing military offensive against Taliban continued to garner media coverage. Media also highlighted reports that the security forces hoisted the national flag in the Damangi area for the first time after clearing it of the Taliban militants, and police arrested Maulvi Kabir, one of the top 10 most-wanted Taliban leaders and a former governor of Afghanistan's Nangahar province. The likely increase in Pakistan's defense budget by 130 billion Rupees in the wake of ongoing military operation in tribal areas were also reported. Assistant Secretary Robert Blake's statement that U.S. is keen to see stable Pak-India ties received prominent display. Continuing its drive against Americans in Pakistan, "The Nation," in its Sunday edition front-paged a report and photographs claiming that "mystery of U.S. personnel's entry into Lahore Cantt solved." The report further asserts that their activities really caught on only recently when they acquired Houses 87 and 88 (Sarwar Colony,) ostensibly for the U.S. embassy staff relocated from Peshawar to Lahore! Commenting on the abduction of four Mercy Corps officials in Baluchistan, "The News," observed that it is "another reminder of how unsafe Pakistan is becoming for international groups carrying out work for impoverished people in remote areas." On the recent arrests of some Taliban leaders, "Daily Times," noted that "Pakistan still exercises great influence over the Afghan Taliban, which is why most of its leadership is hiding out here. Some of Al Qaeda's top leaders have also been arrested in Karachi, underscoring the point that the nexus between the Taliban and Al Qaeda is as strong as ever."End Summary.

TOP STORIES

News Story: All Dictatorial Amends To Go - "The Nation" (02/22)

"Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on Sunday said the nation would be getting good news in March this year when all undesirable amendments introduced in the Constitution by the dictators would be revoked."

News Story: Hume Tipped As Next US Ambassador - "Dawn" (02/22)

"The US administration is thinking of sending another career diplomat Cameron R. Hume to Islamabad to replace Ambassador Anne Patterson who completes her three-year tenure in May. 'She deserves a less demanding job after three excruciating years in Pakistan,' a diplomatic source told Dawn while confirming that the Obama administration had selected Mr Hume to replace Ambassador Patterson."

News Story: CIA Seeks Custody Of Taliban Leader Mulla Baradar - "The News" (02/22)

"Afghan Taliban military commander Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar was captured in Pakistan last month. U.S. officials say he is not revealing useful information and want him transferred to Bagram air base."

News Story: Pakistan Has Taken Impressive Anti-Militant Steps: Petraeus - "Daily Times" (02/22)

"Gen David Petraeus, chief of the US Central Command, on Sunday described as "impressive" Pakistan's anti-militancy strides in recent months as he noted a widespread backing in the key South Asian country for the fight against extremism."

News Story: Marjah First Salvo In Long Campaign: Petraeus - "Daily Times" (02/22)

"The top US general in Afghanistan and Iraq said on Sunday that the current battle around the southern Afghan town of Marjah is the 'opening battle' in a long campaign."

News Story: 'Baradar's Arrest Shows Pak Committed To Fighting Terror' - "Dawn" (02/22)

"The arrest of the Taliban military chief in Karachi should be seen in the context of Pakistan's overall commitment to fight religious extremists, the commander of the US Central Command said in an interview with NBC television on Sunday."

News Story: Mystery Of U.S. Personnel's Entry Into Lahore Cantt Solved - "The Nation" (02/21)

"The Mystery of U.S. Personnel being constantly caught entering into the sensitive area of Lahore Cantonment and thereby getting caught by Military Police has finally been resolved. . . . Their activities really caught on only recently when they acquired Houses 87 and 88 (Sarwar Colony,) ostensibly for the U.S. embassy staff relocated from Peshawar to Lahore."

TERRORISM/MILITARY ISSUES

News Story: Army Hoists Pak Flag In Damangi- "Daily Times" (02/22)

"The security forces and the political administration, in a joint search operation, arrested 80 suspected Taliban, while 20 Taliban including a key commander surrendered in the Bajaur Agency, officials said."

News Story: Top Afghan Taliban Leader Arrested From Nowshera - "Daily Times" (02/22)

"Police in Nowshera arrested Maulvi Kabir, one of the top 10 most-wanted Taliban leaders and a former governor of Afghanistan's Nangahar province, Fox News reported on its website on Sunday."

News Story: Defence Budget Likely To Go Up By Rs 130 Bn - "The News" (02/22)

"Pakistan's defence budget is all set to increase by, at least, Rs 130 billion in the wake of the ongoing military operation against the militants in the tribal areas as well as on account of increased salaries of military personnel, paving the way for achieving a broader consensus with the IMF for jacking up the fiscal deficit target up to 5.1 per cent of the GDP from the earlier envisaged target of 4.9 per cent."

News Story: US Keen To See Stable Pak-India Ties - "The News" (02/22)

"As India and Pakistan prepare for foreign-secretary level talks in New Delhi next week the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Robert Blake has said the US is keen to see the two countries reach a stable relationship on their own terms at the appropriate time."

News Story: Outgunned Taliban Putting Up Tough Fight In Marjah - "Daily Times" (02/22)

"Outnumbered and outgunned, Taliban fighters are mounting a tougher fight than expected in Marjah, Afghan officials said on Sunday, as US-led forces converged on a pocket of militants in a western section of the town."

News Story: Eight Militants Killed In Darra Clash - "The News" (02/22)

"Eight militants were killed and two soldiers sustained injuries in a clash during a search operation in Darra Adamkhel on Sunday, official sources said. The sources said security forces carried out a search operation in Turk Ismailkhel, Jawakai and Shindhand areas where the militants opened fire on security forces. In retaliation, security forces killed eight militants whose identity could not be established while two soldiers reportedly sustained injuries.

News Story: Two More Schools Blown Up In Mohmand - "The News" (02/22)

"Militants blew up two more schools in Safi Tehsil of Mohmand Agency early Sunday, tribal sources said. The sources said a group of militants first placed explosives at various points in the building of the Government Boys' High School in Sandokhel, Safi Sub-division. As a result, the structure was destroyed."

News Story: Kidnapped Sikh Beheaded In Tirah Valley - "Dawn" (02/22)

"Militants have beheaded a kidnapped Sikh in Tirah valley of Khyber Agency after his relatives failed to pay ransom, according to his family."

News Story: US lawmaker promises help over Aafia case - "The Nation" (02/22)

"US Congressman and former joint Chairman of President Obama's Campaign in Chicago Danny Davis has assured that he would join any group in the Congress to obtain justice for Dr Aafia Siddiqui and suggested that Sheila Jackson Lee, a member of Congress from Euston, should be contacted as she is a great supporter of Pakistan and fights for the protection of liberties."

News Story: Americans Terrorise Their Neighbours - "The Nation" (02/21)

"The disclosure of undercover agents of foreign spy agencies residing in the most sensitive locality of the Punjab Capital is an eye-opener for those sitting at the helm of affairs as their mysterious activities are worrying every one residing in the colony. The residents of Sarwar Colony, situated a few hundred meters away from the Fortress Stadium in the Cantonment area, are terrified as they frequently notice mysterious activities taking place inside and outside Houses 87 And 88."

POLITICAL ISSUES

News Story: Outcome Of Talks Depends On India: FM - "Dawn" (02/22)

"Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi said on Sunday that he was optimistic about the outcome of foreign secretary-level talks with India, slated for Feb 25. Talking to representatives of Chinese print and electronic media here, he made it clear that the outcome depended on the response from the Indian side."

News Story: Pakistan Hopes To Make Most Of Feb 25 Talks - "Dawn" (02/22)

"A seven-member Pakistani delegation leaves for New Delhi on Wednesday to attend the foreign secretary-level talks with India, slated for the next day. The Pakistani side would approach the talks 'positively and constructively to make the most out of the renewed engagement', a senior official said on Sunday."

News Story: Pakistan Is Our 'Most Important' Neighbour, Says Chidambaram - "Daily Times" (02/22)

"Pakistan is India's 'most important' neighbouring country, and politics should not hinder bilateral trade between the two countries, Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram said on Sunday."

News Story: NAB Chief Seeks Advice On Swiss Cases - "Dawn" (02/22)

"National Accountability Bureau Chairman Navaid Ahsan has sent a letter to the law ministry seeking advice on how to reopen the Swiss money laundering cases in compliance with a Supreme Court order."

EDITORIALS/OPINIONS

Editorial: No Mercy, an editorial in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/22)

"The kidnapping of four officials of the international humanitarian NGO, Mercy Corps, on their way from Quetta to Zhob is another reminder of how unsafe Pakistan is becoming for international groups carrying out work for impoverished people in remote areas. The kidnapping comes soon after several other similar incidents in Balochistan. Already a number of international groups, including the UN agencies, have pulled out or reduced work in the country's least developed province. This of course works against the interests of people who urgently need all the assistance they can receive."

Editorial: Of Arrests And Negotiations, an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (02/22)

" . . . Washington is not satisfied with Baradar's interrogation and wants to take charge, but Interior Minister Rehman Malik has said that until and unless the investigation is completed, Baradar would not be sent to Afghanistan. This can also be seen as an indication that Pakistan wants to be the sole mediator when it comes to negotiations with the Afghan Taliban. The West and the Afghan government do not approve of this 'offer' by the Pakistani establishment due to the obvious trust deficit and our past record. . . . Pakistan still exercises great influence over the Afghan Taliban, which is why most of its leadership is hiding out here"

Opinion: On An Upward Curve, an op-ed by Talat Masood in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/22)

"The military to military relations between the US and Pakistan seems to be gradually improving. There is a greater level of mutual confidence and less talk of "do more". This has been achieved by enhanced cooperation at operational and intelligence level and is benefiting both sides. It seems sharing is taking place even at the planning stage to ensure greater synergy and to make sure that the operations undertaken by the US on the Afghan side do not have a negative fallout on Pakistan or vice-versa. . . ."

Editorial: The Austin Terrorist , an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/22)

" . . . The lawmakers have no hesitation in not just blaming Muslims, but also invading Muslim countries, on the basis of suspicion of involvement in terrorism, but where US non-Muslim citizens are involved, the reluctance is noticeable; it is almost as if the word 'terrorism' has now been reserved for criminals who happen to be Muslim. CAIR has been asking the US to end its anti-Muslim bias. Being a Muslim, even if not necessarily a very believing or practising one, means being labelled a terrorist in the USA. . . ."

Opinion: Wages Of Misconception, an op-ed by Shahzad Chaudhry in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (02/22)

" Current American thinking is rather defensive; having blasted the Taliban for all this time, it is only a sheepish return to integrating the same elements into the mainstream Afghan fabric. Still, the Americans prefer to call any such attempt or a change of policy as 'integrating' rather than 'conciliating'. Their refuge in verbal obscurantism can be best understood if one remembers it is the 'superpower' that is being made to change a strategy that it has executed for all these years. . . . "

Opinion: Helmand Hullabaloo, an op-ed by Khalid Iqbal in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/22)

" One wonders whether the Americans are treating Pakistan as an ally or as a whipping boy; indeed both of these are being orchestrated in a typical Machiavellian spirit. Recent arrest of Mullah Barader and two "shadow governors" of Taliban indicate that Pakistan is making a sincere effort to fight extremism; and is not shy to act when there is credible intelligence input from the allies. . . . "

Opinion: Saray-Raah [In Passing], a regular satirical column in the second-largest, nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (02/22)

"Full text -- The mystery of Americans' repeated arrests in Lahore has been solved. However, the mystery is: who gave Americans the permission to live in such a sensitive area, where they are involved in suspicious activities and where their Pakistani neighbors are also scared of this situation? If the same had happened to Pakistanis in America they would have been meted out the same treatment that was given to Aafia Siddiqi, who was treated cruelly and tortured on the basis of a fictitious story. In contrast, American saboteurs are running amok in Lahore like pigs. Moreover, they have rented houses in the cantonment; and their activities are suspect because mysterious Americans keep coming and going there. Government of Pakistan's Interior Ministry is not taking any notice of this free movement of Americans in Pakistan. The mystery will be solved when America departs from Pakistan and when Afghans would be allowed to form an independent government in Afghanistan. Allowing Americans full freedom in Pakistan, and letting oneself [Pakistanis] go through humiliating screening - but then again, when the husband and wife [Pakistan government and the U.S.] are willing, what can the priest do? Tourists used to come to Pakistan earlier too, but not to take houses on rent in sensitive residential areas. We must now undo measures taken by Musharraf --End full text."

Opinion: Mossad's Use Of European Travel Documents , an op-ed By Shireen Mazari in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/20)

"A new and dangerous trend for the Muslim states has now surfaced in the form of Israel's murderous intelligence agency, Mossad's access into these countries through the use of American and European passports. . . . For Pakistan these startling revelations pose a very serious threat, given how Israel has been targeting Pakistan's nuclear programme and has evolved an extremely strong strategic partnership with India. While the US has been pressing Pakistan to ease visa procedures for Americans, under the new developments Pakistan will have to scrutinise American and European visa applicants even more closely. It now becomes critical for the Interior Ministry to identify how many Americans were given Pakistani visas in the last few years and where exactly these Americans are now based."

Opinion: Secularism Vs Islamism, an op-ed by Iqbal Akhund in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (02/22)

" The average Pakistani is devout and religion is an important part of his being. Islamic signs and symbols are everywhere but Pakistanis are not willing to be ruled by clerics and do not vote for the religious parties. Yet a rightwing Islamism (the

Shariat Court calling land reform un-Islamic, for instance) coupled with an exhibitionist religiosity has been making headway in the country's politics and hearts and minds. The Islamists care little for votes and elections but rely on sympathisers in the administration, the education system and the military to promote an agenda concerned with ritual and revival rather than welfare and progress."

Editorial: Indian Intransigence On The Talks Agenda, an editorial note in the second-largest, nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (02/22)

"Indian Interior Minister P. Chidambram has said that on top of the Indo-Pak talks agenda would be issues related to terrorism, Mumbai blast investigation, cross-border infiltration and handover of Jamaatud Dawa chief Hafiz Saeed... If India wants to limit the upcoming talks only to terrorism, will our Foreign Secretary participate in talks only to get dictation from India?...Kashmir should be the focus of Indo-Pak talks, and these talks should pave the way for implementation of UN resolutions. Otherwise, Pak-India talks cannot be productive."

Editorial: Chinese Economic Zone, an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (02/22)

"Chief Minister Punjab has said that a Chinese investment group will establish a Chinese economic zone in Punjab spread over 100,000 acres. The CM has signed a memorandum of understanding to this effect... China is our trusted friend and has come to our help at all trying times....We have no objection to land being given to Chinese investors in the Punjab, but the local investors must also be encouraged. China is very strong economically, and will destroy our local industry. The government must also ponder over these issues."

(All circulation figures are based on estimation)

Patterson